

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1804

June 12, 2008

The Honorable Michael Chertoff  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
301 7th Street SW, Mail Stop 0501  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

Yesterday, a CNN investigation found that almost \$85 million in household goods meant for Katrina and Rita victims was recently shifted to Federal and state agencies after sitting in warehouses for two years. Overall, it is my understanding from the report that 121 truckloads of material were given to such agencies as the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Veterans Affairs and to agencies within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Many of these goods were purchased by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as "starter kits" for families living in trailers and others were donated by private companies.

While I understand the stated need to save taxpayer money being spent storing these materials, I am concerned that there are still ongoing needs for these types of goods in my state. I would like to have your assistance in reviewing this situation and redistributing these goods to those still in need as a result of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

There is a particular and critical need for exactly these materials – especially household goods – by organizations dealing with the critical problem of homelessness as a result of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. One such organization is UNITY of Greater New Orleans, which works with FEMA to house homeless hurricane victims and was featured prominently in the CNN piece.

Many other not-for-profit organizations that continue to do the necessary work of rebuilding Louisiana, Mississippi and the other Gulf States could also put these assets to good use. For example, the materials could be used for families that are getting new homes through groups such as Habitat for Humanity, Rebuilding Together and the St. Bernard project. These types of resources could also be used to support the thousands of volunteers who continue to offer their valuable time on the ground. Additionally, providing these resources could free up funds that are needed for building materials and skilled labor.

As you may know, I have been working since 2006 to secure \$70 million for the State of Louisiana to provide 3,000 permanent supportive housing vouchers. These vouchers are needed to provide rental subsidies and supportive services for homeless individuals in my state. In New Orleans alone, we have almost 12,000 residents who are

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homeless, which is double the number we had pre-Katrina. Many of these people are desperately in need of permanent housing as they are elderly, disabled and mentally ill. I was pleased that this funding was included in the Senate-passed FY08 Emergency Supplemental, which is currently under consideration in the House of Representatives. But while this funding is critical to helping provide basic housing, it takes additional supplies to transform such housing into livable homes for these families.

I am currently working with the State of Louisiana, UNITY and other groups to identify specific needs for household supplies and toiletries and to ensure these groups are each properly registered with the appropriate agencies to be eligible for the federal surplus supplies. While we work to secure needs assessments, I would respectfully request your assistance in conducting a complete inventory and identifying unobligated supplies within the Department of Homeland Security to provide to these groups. If possible, I would also like your assistance with the General Services Administration to identify unobligated supplies provided to other Federal agencies.

I believe that if we work together, we can get some of these surplus materials in the hands of the thousands of Gulf Coast families still in such desperate need for them. I look forward to working with you on this most important endeavor.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and to your ongoing efforts to help address ongoing needs in the Gulf Coast.

Sincerely,



Mary L. Landrieu  
United States Senator

MLL:brv/ams

cc: The Honorable R. David Paulison, Administrator, FEMA  
Mr. David Bibb, Acting Administrator, General Services Administration